

Pro-Iranian Lobbies at Work - Part 3

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Today ,the world is faced with its biggest present challenge, which incorporates the prospects of a catastrophic war, due to the mullahs insistence on pressing ahead with their nuclear weapons program, their deadly and uninterrupted interference in the affairs of Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon, as well as their relentless efforts to export terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism abroad.

At the same time Tehrans incapability to solve basic issues at home with shooting prices and rising inflation, unemployment and poverty, Tehran has been facing a chain of unprecedented demonstrations during the past year, with leaping statistics after the Iranian New Year. Official reports in various news papers, each reveal part of the reality of the weakened regime in Tehran. Despite extreme suppression and control, at least 4500 demonstrations and protests took place in various cities in Iran.

Amidst all this, there is a worst situation for the regime: rising popularity of its opponent and enemy number one; the NCRI, with its pivotal force PMOI. The oppositions hyperactive revelations inside and outside Iran, concerning suppression, export of terrorism and nuclear deception of the regime has been deterrent for Tehran.

This research and case study, would point to an irrefutable development: Tehran has become more unstable and illegitimate inside and outside Iran. The Iranian opposition is begging to play a more definite role in the future developments in Iran.

In order to vilify the PMOI and the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI a broad coalition of democratic Iranian opposition groups and personalities, of which the PMOI is a member organization), the mullahs make use of their agents and associates to set up numerous front organizations and networks in European countries and the United States. Some of the tactics used by the MOIS over this movement is studied in this research.

Part 3:

Harassment of dissidents' families

The MOIS routinely harasses and intimidates dissidents outside Iran by exerting pressure on their families inside the country. In most cases, the MOIS compels the families to contact their children abroad to urge them to discontinue their anti-regime activities and refrain from supporting the opposition. In other cases, the MOIS has arrested families of exiled Iranians to force them to take a position against the Resistance or collaborate with the regime.

In one example in 1995, MOIS officials approached the parents of Mr. Abbas Minachi, a veteran PMOI member, and claimed he had been imprisoned by the organization. In a statement that was distributed as a United Nations document at the Sub-commission for Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities at the time, Pax Christi wrote, "(to be taken from the original text, which was not found on relevant sites)" [6]

Ultimately, Mr. Minachi came to Europe and contacted his father who was in the United States at the time to assure him of his well-being. He also met Prof. Copithorne in Geneva, unmasked the mullahs' ploys, and later wrote a letter to human rights organizations concerning the MOIS propaganda. [7]

The United Nations Sub-Commission for Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities issued a resolution on August 16, 1996, expressing profound concern over ". " [8] The same year, the Washington Times wrote, ". " [9]

Annual reports by the German and Dutch security services, which appear in subsequent chapters, show that such activities are continuing.

In the first half of 2003, the MOIS forcibly assembled a number of PMOI families, especially elderly parents, outside the Swiss Embassy (U.S. Interest Section), United Nations Development Office and Hotel Laleh, which is controlled by the Intelligence Ministry. These actions were intended to propagate the notion that PMOI members were being held in Iraq against their will and must be returned to Iran.

In the most recent case, on Wednesday July 16, 2003, the MOIS deceived the families, of a number of Mojahedin and National Liberation Army members (NLA is the official Freedom Army of the resistance, stationed out of Iranian territory, today known as protected persons under the 4th Geneva Convention) and took them to PMOI's central office in Baghdad to stage a demonstration against the organization.

The MOIS had been working on this plan for several months. It set up a fake association, the so-called 'Salvation Association' to help the families and promised them that they could see their children.

The MOIS took the families to the border town of Mehran, where it briefed them. It then took them to Iraq to Al-Dahwi hotel in Kadhamiya district of Baghdad. There, MOIS agents told the families that the Mojahedin would not allow them visit their children.

On July 16, the regime's agents handed the families placards with anti-PMOI slogans in Arabic and English and took them to the PMOI's central office in Baghdad. A camera crew from Iran's state-run television was filming the entire episode.

Once informed by the PMOI representatives that they would welcome such visits, the families expressed their abhorrence at the regime for exploiting their feelings and said that all Iranians hated the mullahs and impatiently awaited their overthrow.

In response, the opposition issued a statement to reporters, the same day and declared its readiness to make the necessary arrangements for these families to meet their children. In its statement, it emphasized that the gates of PMOI camps were open to the families and they could meet their relatives and children without any hindrance. Subsequently, the families stayed at Camp Ashraf for several days and met their relatives.

Cultural Associations

Forming cultural associations to disseminate false propaganda against its number one enemy, is another MOIS tactic. These associations are purported not to be in contact with the regime and in fact even criticize it. One such association is Damavand Cultural Association, which uses a Canadian address. Others are Peyvand Association in the Netherlands and Dena organization in Germany. Mahdis and Iran-Interlink websites are among other outlets set up by the MOIS to disseminate propaganda against the PMOI. All these associations and websites focus their propaganda against this movement, while using the cover of independent or even anti-regime entities.

For example, Iran-Interlink website, run by a British convert, Anne Khodabandeh (Singleton), is entirely controlled by MOIS. Prior to setting up Iran-Interlink, she traveled to Iran and stayed there for a month. Iran-Interlink is closely connected with the Intelligence Ministry's branches in the Netherlands and Germany. One of the website's information sources is Dena organization in Germany.

In introducing itself, the website states, "our objective is to further expose the real nature of the Mojahedin and act as a pressure group... This site has been formed as an outlet for families and persons the status of whose friends and acquaintances as disaffected members and cadres of the People's Mojahedin Organization in Iraq are unsettled and whose lives are in danger..." In a letter to Amnesty International's director for the Middle East Program, Mohammad Mohaddessin, Chairmain of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NCR explained Singleton's contacts and her month-long trip to Iran in the winter of 2002 before launching the Web site. [10]

In its annual 1999 report, Germany's Office for Protection of the Constitution wrote:

"The People's Mujahiddin of Iran (MEK) and its political arm, the National Resistance Council of Iran, continued to be the focus of the intelligence interest of the Iranian intelligence service. In its fight against the Iranian opposition in exile, VEVAK (ed: Farsi acronym for MOIS) makes use of the so-called cultural associations. These are front organizations founded and directed by VEVAK and acting in accordance with Iran's interests and wishes. In addition, the Iranian intelligence service produces anti-MEK publications which in part are published by former MEK activists and have the aim of persuading readers of these publications to abandon the organization." [11]

Infiltration and espionage

The clerical regime has been engaged in attempts to infiltrate opposition organizations and exiles for a long time. It has been using this tactic in its psychological warfare against the Resistance and in intelligence gathering for terrorist operations.

In late 1997, the counter-intelligence directorate of the National Liberation Army of Iran published the names of 34 MOIS agents who had been sent to infiltrate the NLA between 1992 to 1997. It also published the particulars and addresses of more than 150 MOIS officials and operatives and the addresses of more than 60 secret safe houses, hotels and locations used by the MOIS [12]. The directorate also revealed details on MOIS plans to "assassinate commanders and combatants, poison drinking water and food, and collect intelligence on meetings." The MOIS taught some of its spies to pretend to the PMOI that they had escaped from the regime's prisons.

In July 2002, the NLA counter-intelligence directorate also revealed the names and particulars of 36 more MOIS agents identified since the previous report [13]. In this 120-page report, the NLA counter-intelligence revealed the details of contact, payment, and briefing of spies by the Intelligence Ministry in Iran before sending them abroad on assignment. The missions included, for example, intelligence gathering, sabotage, writing pro-regime slogans in NLA bases, identifying potential collaborators within the organization and recruiting them, arresting or killing members of the Resistance inside Iran or near the border region and plans to assassinate and murder PMOI members through poisoning water and food of their bases.

The report also gave the names of 23 PMOI members murdered by these infiltrators. They were Abdolreza Shatti Ahmadian, Behrouz Majd-Abadi, Ali Nouri, Loghman Haj Khanian, Abdollah Towhidi-far, Parviz Ahmadi, Farhad Tahmasbi, Jamal Ahani, Mahmoud Gholizadeh, Hadi Homayoun, Akbar Bagheri, Philip Yousefieh, Ramin Gholan Ghadaksaz, Ahmad Pahlevan Shandiz, Mehdi Baba'i, Issa Heidari, Abdollah Navid Hassan-lou'i, Mahmoud Agah, Hossein Alamdari, Mohsen Arab-Mohammadi, Mehdi Baimani, Monireh Akbari and Mojgan Zahedi. Dozens more were trapped by infiltrators inside Iran and executed. Hundreds of others were captured.

Despite the gravity of the crimes committed by the mullahs' spies, the PMOI did not punish any of these agents. Instead, it informed international human rights organizations of the details of their actions and allowed them to return to Iran (see chapter fifteen for more details on the Resistance's amnesty policy).

In recent years, security services in different countries uncovered several cases of infiltration and espionage against Iranian refugees and dissidents in Europe, which led to the arrest of the MOIS agents. In the year 2000, a German court convicted an MOIS agent, Hamid Khorsand, for attempting to infiltrate the ranks of the supporters of the PMOI and the NCRI in order to collect information for terrorist purposes.

The indictment issued by the federal prosecutor enumerated the methods used by Khorsand, including penetration of pro-Mojahedin milieu of Iranian exiles, and many documents on espionage and his case officers in the MOIS. The indictment noted that the MOIS intended to

deliver a blow to the PMOI through Khorsand's activities and paid him at least twice, each time a sum of DM 12,500. The indictment also said that Khorsand's first handler was an MOIS agent in the Iranian consulate in Berlin. After his expulsion in April 1997, in the aftermath of the Mykonos trial, a man named Seyyed became Khorsand's case officer and gave Khorsand instructions from Tehran.

In repeated telephone contacts, the MOIS repeatedly urged Khorsand to maintain closer ties with the PMOI and constantly criticized him for not doing enough. Khorsand stepped up his contacts with the NCRI office in Cologne to gather more intelligence.

Testimony by German security officers

In the course of the trial, two officers of the German Office to Protect the Constitution unveiled some aspects of the activities of the Tehran regime against the PMOI and the NCRI. One officer said, for example, that Khorsand had been cooperating with the MOIS since 1995 and was specifically in contact with Kazem Darabi, who was involved in the killing of the Kurdish leaders at the Mykonos in Berlin in 1992. Noting that the regime was particularly keen on gathering intelligence on the PMOI, he told the court that a recorded conversation between an MOIS official in Tehran, Saeed, and Khorsand about Laila (Mahin Afshar, a PMOI official) showed that the MOIS was actively pursuing the activities of the opposition and the network of supporters. The officer added that since PMOI activities were public, Tehran was after identifying their officials. He also emphasized that German security services had learned from their experiences in the Mykonos killings that Iranian agents were not seeking information just for the sake of it, but that they sought to use it for terrorist operations against dissidents.

Another officer of the same department told the court that he was confident that Khorsand was an Iranian Intelligence agent. He added that prior to the Mykonos trial, most MOIS agents were working out of the third floor of the Iranian embassy in Bonn. The officer said that the regime sends its agents to third countries such as Turkey and Malaysia to brief them. He said that the PMOI had been politically active for 30 years. While it was engaged in a military struggle against the regime inside Iran, outside the country it only carried out publicity activities aimed at exposing the Tehran regime. For instance, it held protests against visits by Iranian officials to Europe. The officer said that the MOIS was keenly interested in collecting information about such activities. It even sought to know how many bullhorns were used in such rallies to see how it could disrupt it. More importantly, it wanted to know who the organizers of such events were. Through Khorsand, the MOIS was trying to identify, put under surveillance and even assassinate a woman member of the PMOI named Laila, similar to what happened in Turkey. There, the MOIS identified a woman, Zahra Rajabi and assassinated her along with a colleague. The Intelligence Ministry devoted all its efforts to identify the PMOI, while the latter conducted a political campaign against the Tehran regime in Europe. The German security official said the PMOI was the only active opposition group during the G-8 summit and at the Federal parliament. The Iranian government attempted to deliver blows to it. The PMOI had extensive contact with the media and provided them with interesting information. It even gave the names of the Iranian regime's spies to the media.

Murder of Christian priests

A glance at earlier examples of MOIS disinformation campaigns against the PMOI shows that it has been conducting such activities against the PMOI for a long time.

The leaders of the Assemblies of God churches in Iran, Bishop Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, Pastor Mehdi Dibaj and Bishop Tataos Michaelian, disappeared one after another and were mysteriously murdered in 1994.

On June 6, 1994, Mehdi Dibaj was abducted on his way to Tehran's Mehrabad Airport. Shortly afterwards, his mutilated body, bearing multiple stab wounds, was found dumped in a remote park in Tehran. Pastor Dibaj had been imprisoned since 1986 and sentenced to death on charges of apostasy in a court in the northern Iranian city of Sari in December 1993. Extensive international pressure forced his release in January 1994.

On January 31, 1994, the body of Bishop Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, the General Secretary of the Assemblies of God churches in Iran and chairman of the Council of Protestant Ministers, was found in a copse near Tehran. He disappeared three days after Mehdi Dibaj's release from prison. His body, riddled with stab wounds, was handed over to his family 11 days later. As the leader of the Assemblies of God's churches in Iran, he worked tirelessly to secure the release of Mehdi Dibaj from prison and was an unremitting advocate of religious freedom in Iran.

MOIS agents murdered Bishop Tataos Michaelian in June 1994 in Tehran. He had replaced Hovsepian-Mehr as the leader of the Assemblies of God churches. He disappeared on June 29, 1994, but the Intelligence Ministry delivered his body to his son on July 2, 1994.

At the time, the MOIS and the regime's officials lost no opportunity to accuse the Mojahedin of the murders. They even arranged a press conference in which three women, claiming to be PMOI members, confessed to the killings, which they said had been carried out on the orders of the Mojahedin.

The ridiculous stage-managing did not deceive anyone, however. Several prominent international bodies rejected the mullahs' claims as propaganda and explicitly or implicitly blamed the regime for the murders. Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Hanley of Britain wrote in a letter on December 4, 1995, "Despite the fact that the trial was held in public, it is not possible to say that justice was done. We are concerned that certain aspects of the procedure did not conform to generally accepted international standards." [14]

In his February 9, 1996 report, Abdelfattah Amor, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Religious Tolerance, wrote "The Iranian government had apparently decided to execute those Protestant leaders in order not only to bring the Mojahedin organization into disrepute abroad by declaring it responsible for those crimes, but also, at the domestic level, partly to decapitate the Protestant community and force it to discontinue the conversion of Muslims." [15]

In the course of the escalation of factional feuding some years later, different government officials revealed that the entire episode was the brainchild of Deputy Intelligence Minister

Saeed Emami, a key figure in the serial murders of political dissidents in the fall of 1998. The state-run Hamshahri daily wrote on June 24, 1999, "A number of deputies representing religious minorities at the Islamic Assembly (Majlis), intend to call for the reopening of the file on the murder of three Christian clergymen killed a few years ago by three members of the Mojahedin. They said Saeed Emami's involvement in this affair prompted them to make such a call. During investigations into this case, Saeed Emami had arranged for a meeting between the three women and these Majlis deputies. As the Deputy Minister of Intelligence, Emami briefed the Majlis deputies." [16]

Then-Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri wrote in now-defunct Khordad daily : "How is it that when those Christian clergymen were murdered and then their mutilated bodies were placed in a refrigerator, the killers' identities were not made public?" [17]

The same daily wrote two weeks later on November 18, 1999: "In what way were those who claimed in a television interview to be Mojahedin supporters and to have murdered the Christian priests connected to Saeed Emami, the number-two man in the Intelligence Ministry at the time? For what crime were the Iranian Christian clergymen kidnapped in 1994, and kept in refrigerator after being mutilated? How did [these women] agree to be interviewed and what happened to them eventually?" Noting that the priests were murdered based on a religious decree, the daily added, "Who issued the religious decree for these murders?" [18]

A former Revolutionary Guards Commander Akbar Ganji, now out of favor with the ruling faction, said in a December 4, 1999 interview with the Arya daily: "Murdering the clergymen and blaming it on the Mojahedin enabled the perpetrators to liquidate the Christian priests and further discredit the Mojahedin." [19]

Bombing of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza

A powerful bomb rocked the holy shrine of Imam Reza, the revered eighth Shiite Imam, in the northeastern city of Mashad on June 20, 1994. Scores of worshipers in the packed shrine were reportedly killed or wounded. Several hours later, the scenes of severed limbs and broken glass, broadcast on the state television, shocked viewers across the country.

Immediately after the news of the bombing broke out, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said on the state radio: "The [Mojahedin], blind-hearted and treacherous as they are, have shown that they have no respect whatsoever for the holy family of the Prophet. Such a sacred and magnificent location and such a momentous occasion does not prevent them from displaying their vengeance and vicious enmity toward they Iranian nation." [20]

The clerical regime tried to take advantage of this criminal act on the political and international level. Then-Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati summoned all foreign ambassadors to his Ministry and demanded that their governments condemn the Mojahedin and the Iranian Resistance.

Sometime later, the mullahs claimed that the man who planted the bomb in Imam Reza's shrine had been wounded in a clash as he was trying to leave the country and had confessed that he was

a member of the Mojahedin. Two days later, the mullahs announced that the man had died due to the severity of his wounds. Just before his death, the regime claimed, the man had been able to tell the authorities that he was a member of "the Mojahedin" and ordered by them to plant the bomb!

Hardly anyone in and out of Iran took the clerics' fantastic stories seriously. This prompted the mullahs' propaganda organs to lash out at Western governments and international human rights agencies for not believing the mullahs' propaganda.

In a report entitled "The most unprecedented Western and Zionist news censorship against Iran," the semi-official daily Ressalat wrote: "During the past three weeks, the official news agency, IRNA, has written more than 300 news stories, commentaries, etc. about the murder of two Christian priests, the bombing of Imam Reza's shrine,.. and the Maki Mosque in Zahedan. In a coordinated fashion, the Western, Zionist media that are particularly sensitive to developments in Iran have remained silent about these terrorist actions and even backed the Mojahedin agents..." [21]

Ultimately, during the revelations on the 1998 chain murders, the state-controlled media acknowledged that the bombing of Imam Reza's shrine, similar to the murder of the Christian priests, had been planned and carried out by the MOIS to tarnish the image of the Mojahedin. In a report on this matter, the daily Khordad wrote on November 20, 1999: "Is not this possible that those who plant bombs in public places to pressure the state officials to halt investigations into the case [of serial killings], may have masterminded the incidents of Feiz Mosque in Mashad.... and the bombing of the holy Shrine of Imam Reza a few years ago in order to defuse international pressures over the murder of Christian clergymen? And was the linking of these three incidents not an attempt to undermine the notion that the murder of the Christian priests may have been an internal affair and to prevent any government official from being held responsible for the killings?" [22]

The murder of Christian leaders and the bombing of the holiest Shiite shrine in Iran are just two examples of the atrocities perpetrated by MOIS agents in their dirty war against the Mojahedin, but they reveal the shocking extent to which the ruling theocrats are prepared to go to demonize their foes.

[6] Pax Christie, UN official document , 22 August 1996, see Appendix

[7] Abbas Minachi, Letter to Professor Capithorne, 14 August 1998, see Appendix

[8] United Nations documents at the Sub-commission of Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, August22, 1996, Appendix

[9] Iran's visible hand in terrorism, The Washington Times, March 14, 1996

[10] Mohammad Mohaddessin, letter to June Ray, 20 January 2003

[11] 1999 Annual report, German Office for the Protection of the Constitution,Bfv

[12] Mojahedin weekly, issue no. 380, March2, 1998

[13] Mojahedin weekly, issue no. 592, July 2, 2002

[14] Letter, Jeremy Hanely, December4,1995

[15] UN's Special Representative Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations

- on Religious Tolerance, Feb.9, 1996
[16] Hamshahri daily, June 24, 1999
[17] Khordad daily, 30 Octobre 1999
[18] Khordad,November18, 1999
[19] Arya daily, December4, 1999
[20] State Radio, June 20, 1994
[21] Resalat daily, July 16, 1999
[22] Khordad, November 20, 1999